NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

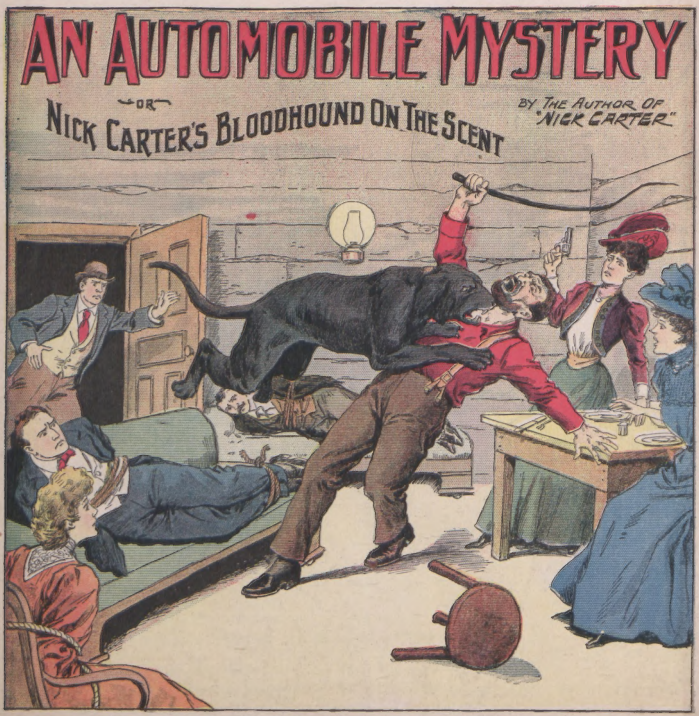
Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 520 NEW YORK, DECEMBER 15, 1906. **Price, Five Cents**

AN AUTOMOBILE MYSTERY

OR NICK CARTER'S BLOODHOUND ON THE SCENT

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



Pedro, who had seen his beloved master struck, uttered a snarl like a tiger, and launched his huge body forward in one terrific leap.

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An Automobile Mystery;

OR,

Nick Carter's Bloodhound On the Scent.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST BLOW IS DEALT.

The last case upon which Nick Carter had been engaged had closed somewhat disastrously for him, inasmuch as it had left him rather severely, although not at all dangerously, wounded.

Two bullets had struck him in the side, and, after fracturing one of his ribs, had passed out again, inflicting a painful but not a serious wound.

It became necessary, however, that he should lie by for awhile and leave the conduct of his strenuous affairs in the hands of his assistants; and as the month was June, at the time he was hurt, he had himself conveyed to his country estate just across the border in Connecticut, where Joseph, his valet, waited upon him, and Pedro, his faithful bloodhound, kept him company; and where also his good friend Lawrence Hamilton with his fiancée, Doris Granley, made it a point to call upon him at least twice a week.

His country place is only a two hours' automobile-trip from New York City, and the couple, who were soon to be married, delighted in that ride to and from the detective's country home, with Mrs. Aldershot—Doris' aunt—and usually some friend with her to sit in the tonneau and play propriety.

Nick was rapidly recovering from the effects of his wounds by the end of June, and when the twenty-eighth day of the month was set for the wedding-ceremony of his two friends, he announced that he would be ready for it; that he would be quite well enough to go into town to attend.

The morning of the twenty-seventh—the day before the wedding—was one of those beautiful mornings which come only in the month of June, and Nick Carter, having partaken of his early breakfast, was seated in a big, comfortable chair on the wide veranda, when Joseph came to him with the morning's mail.

It consisted of the morning papers and three letters; there were no more letters for the reason that there were few persons who knew just at that time where Nick Carter was staying.

The detective perceived that one of the letters was

from Chick, another was from Doris, and that the third was addressed in a handwriting that was not familiar.

He opened the letter from Doris, and found only a few lines, to tell him that she and Hamilton were coming out to see him early in the day, for a last call before the wedding, which was to take place at noon of the following day.

The letter from Chick was rather startling in its character, so it is given here, in full.

"Dear Nick," he wrote. "I don't suppose you see the evening papers there, as well as the morning editions. I write this in some haste to tell you that one of them contained a 'scare head' this afternoon in which it was announced that Madge Morley, the 'Dangerous Woman,' was again at large. There was only about half a stick of type, but it intimated that another woman, presumably Norma Denton, was somehow instrumental in her escape from the prison for the criminal insane, to which she had been transferred. I shall investigate it at once, and will let you know as soon as I have discovered anything definite. It occurs to me that if it is true that she is at liberty again, it would be well for Hamilton and Doris to place all possible safeguards around themselves."

That was all that Chick's letter contained.

The detective returned it to the envelope, and opened the third letter.

It was very brief and very much to the point. It said:

"Miss Madge Morley presents her most distinguished regards to Mr. Nicholas Carter, and begs to assure him that after considerable delay caused by circumstances over which she had no control, she is again at liberty to resume her interrupted ambitions; and she desires Mr. Carter to assure his and her mutual acquaintances, who are now contemplating matrimony, that they are not forgotten."

The detective held the letter in his hand after he had completed the reading of it and uttered a long, low whistle, at which Pedro, lying beside him, got upon his feet and shoved his cool muzzle beneath the detective's hand.

"Good old chap," said the detective, smiling. "One would suppose that you know by instinct when anything troubles me. I think if Madge tries any of her funny games on us now, Pedro, I will put *you* on her track."

The dog looked up at him and wagged his tail, as if he perfectly understood what had been said, and was prepared to take up the case at a moment's notice.

"I guess that the rumor which Chick refers to is a fact," the detective continued, thinking aloud. "Madge is free, all right, and she means business, too."

He sighed, relighted his cigar, and, reaching out, picked up one of the morning papers.

Almost the first article of news that met his eye was this:

"Madge Morley, who has a long criminal record, and who about a month ago was committed to Auburn Prison, and who, shortly afterward, was transferred to the prison for the criminal insane, has mysteriously escaped and is again at large.

"It is only about ten days since she was adjudged insane and was transferred from Auburn to the prison from which she made her escape, and it is now evident that she played the part of an insane person purposely to further her scheme for obtaining her liberty.

"The prison officials profess utter ignorance concerning her manner of escape, and positively decline to give out any information whatever."

Following this statement was a paragraph which newspaper men call a "shirt-tail," and which gave a brief and concise account of the woman's career.

It stated, for instance, that Madge Morley had first appeared in this country under the protection of two English baronets, Sir James Bundy and Sir Eustace Kidder—both of whom were now convicts in Sing Sing Prison—at which time she had posed as Lady Doris Granley.

Her machinations had, however, been discovered and brought to a halt by Detective Nick Carter," etc., etc.

There were other accounts of the affair in the remaining papers, but none of them contained any further information than that which the detective had already read.

Nick left his chair and walked slowly into the house, where he presently called his chief assistant over the telephone.

"Chick," he said, when they were in communication, "have you seen the morning papers?"

"About Madge, you mean? Yes. I have seen them. You received my letter, of course? Phone was out of order, or I would have called you up."

"Yes; I received it."

"Have you got any orders for me in regard to the matter?"

"Only this: Send Ten-Ichi and Patsy out at once; one of them to Hamilton and the other to Doris. Have them disguise themselves as thoroughly as possible, and tell them that they are not to lose sight of the people under their care."

"That will be rather a difficult proposition under the present circumstances, won't it?" asked Chick.

"Yes, of course. What I mean is that they must not lose sight of Hamilton and Doris for any longer period of time than is absolutely necessary, until after the ceremony to-morrow, and until the wedding-tour is begun. After that I suppose Hamilton can take care of himself. Attend to that at once, Chick."

"All right. Any orders for me, personally?"

"Only that you may drop everything else for the present and use your own judgment in assisting Pat and Ten in what they have to do."

"All right."

"And, Chick?"

"Yes."

"I have just received a note from Doris in which she says that she and Larry are coming out here this morning in the motor. I think they should be followed, if they have not already started."

"And even if they have started, eh? I might overtake them, you know."

"Yes. Good-by. That's all."

The detective returned to the veranda, and lighted a fresh cigar, after which he sat silently for a long time, gently stroking the silken ears of the bloodhound.

"It is remarkable how the mere mention of that woman's name will stir me up," he was thinking. "But then, she is a dangerous woman; the most dangerous I have ever known, with just one exception."

He resumed the reading of the papers again, and rapidly went through them, absorbing the news much after the manner of a newspaper-man who, if you will notice, inevitably goes through a paper column by column, reading with care whatever happens to be attractive, and glancing casually through the rest of the matter, so that by the time the paper is folded again and laid aside, he has comprehended all that it contains.

By the time he had finished with the papers, he could hear the droning of an automobile in the distance, and presently a huge machine turned into the winding road that led from the highway to his door, and presently drew up in front of him.

The car contained Hamilton and Doris in the forward seats and three ladies in the tonneau, two of whom were strangers to the detective, the third one being Doris' aunt, Mrs. Aldershot.

"Hello, Nick!" Hamilton called out. "This is just a flying visit. We are not even going to get out of the car. Doris has so many things to attend to to-day that she insists upon returning at once. We only came for the ride, you know."

Nick arose rather slowly from his chair, and went to the edge of the veranda.

"You'd better get down for a few minutes," he said.

"No," laughed Hamilton. "I promised." He half-turned in his seat, and added:

"I want to present you to Madame, the Princess Sorosis; and to her traveling-companion, Mademoiselle Susine. Mr. Carter, ladies. Now, Nick, how are you? Getting better every day?"

"Yes, indeed."

"You will be on hand to-morrow? Eh?"

"Sure. I think that I will go into town to-night, Larry."

"Good. I'll try to run in to see you during the evening. Good-by."

Hamilton started the machine forward. There was a general waving of hands, some laughter, and the great car sped out of sight again and droned itself away in the distance, down the highway.

The detective settled back in his chair again, closed his eyes, and presently dropped into a light sleep; but he was awakened suddenly, almost an hour later, by the chug-chug of a second automobile, which came to a stop directly in front of him.

As the detective started to his feet, he saw Chick leap from under the wheel and open the side door of the tonneau; and then on the instant he became conscious of the fact that the tonneau was not empty.

There were three people there—three women—who were either dead or unconscious, and while he stared at them in amazement, Chick lifted one of them in his arms and bore her to the veranda.

She opened her eyes, and Chick placed her gently down, and instantly Nick recognized the beautiful face of the princess to whom Hamilton had introduced him only a short hour before; and then, as he turned his eyes again upon the others, he saw that they were the companion of the princess, Mademoiselle Susine, and that the other one was Mrs. Aldershot.

And in that instant he realized that Madge Morley had lost no time in dealing her first blow.

CHAPTER II.

A MOST MYSTERIOUS ACCIDENT.

The detective forgot his own weakness in the anxiety of the moment; but he quickly discovered that Mrs. Aldershot was the only member of the party who seemed to be seriously injured. She was still unconscious, and blood was flowing from a wound on her head.

But the princess and her companion, although apparently terribly shaken and visibly suffering from shock, were conscious, and did not seem to have received any wounds.

Joseph was summoned, the ladies were assisted into the house, a doctor, who fortunately lived near at hand, was called over the telephone, Nick's housekeeper took charge of the women, and at last the detective and his assistant found time to sit down together and talk it over, for as yet there had not been a word said about what had happened.

"Now, Chick," said the detective, "I can't wait any longer. What is it all about?"

"I only wish I knew," replied Chick. "But I don't."

"Tell me what you do know, then."

"I was following out your orders. I telephoned over to the Aldershots', after I heard from you this morning,

and found that Hamilton and Doris had already left the house in the auto, with Mrs. Aldershot in the rear seat."

"Well?"

"I transmitted your orders to Ten-Ichi and Patsy, told them that I would not need either of them on this trip, and started in the Peerless to overtake Hamilton.

"As soon as I got to where the road was clear, I let her out and spun along at a good old clip until I was about two miles below here."

Nick nodded.

"You know where that sharp bend is in the road, near what you call Church Rock—well, I had just slowed down to go around that bend, when a woman appeared in front of me, waving her hands, and I stopped altogether. It was the princess. Didn't you say she was the Princess of something or other?"

"Yes. Princess Sorosis. Go on."

"I jumped out and ran to her and managed to catch her just as she was falling in a faint, so I laid her down on the grass beside the road and went on a little farther to see what was the matter."

"And you found—what?"

"I found what had once been Hamilton's Mercedes car. It is a total wreck, Nick. How in the world anybody ever escaped from it alive is more than I can say. It was turned half-over at one side of the road, and it looked as if it had been under a steam-hammer for an hour or two. Mrs. Aldershot was partly under it, but I managed to haul her out. That other woman—is she a princess, too."

"I don't know. Go on."

"She was up in the bushes alongside of the road. They had evidently broken her fall so that she wasn't much hurt; but she was unconscious, just the same, and remained so all the time until she came around a few minutes ago, after we carried her into the house."

"And Hamilton and Doris, Chick! Where are they?"

"God knows. I don't."

"Gone?"

"Lock, stock, and barrel. Hook, line, bob, and sinker. Vanished."

"Did you search?"

"*Search?* I looked everywhere. Under the wrecked machine. Through the bushes. There wasn't a sign of them anywhere around there at all."

"What in the world does it mean, Chick?"

"I think it means Madge," was the quiet reply.

"I am afraid it does, too. But how was it done? There could not have been a collision with another machine, for in that case there would have been two wrecks in the road."

Chick shook his head, and said nothing.

"I don't suppose you have had any chance to ask any of them a question?" said Nick.

"Chance? No. As soon as I determined that nothing more could be done there, I loaded them into the Peerless and hurried here. Now you know all that I know about it. Say, Nick?"

"Well?"

"Who is the princess?"

"I haven't an idea, Chick. All that I know about her is that she was in the Mercedes with Hamilton and the others when they drove up here to my door. None of them got out at all. They weren't here more than three minutes, in fact. Hamilton introduced me, but he didn't say a word further as to whom the princess and her companion really are."

"She's a rattling handsome young woman, Nick."

"Yes, rather."

"And so is her friend."

"Yes," admitted the detective absently.

"I don't suppose that you ever saw either of them before, did you?"

"No, I think not. Why?"

"I was only wondering if I had. I sort of got that idea into my head when I looked at her while she was in a faint, but I was mistaken. Hello! Here she comes, now. She has pulled herself together, all right. She will tell us what we wish to know about the accident."

The two men rose to greet the princess as she approached, and Nick indicated that she was to occupy the easy chair in which he had been seated; but she declined, seating herself, instead, upon one of the steps of the veranda.

"No," she said. "I am not hurt at all. I am only badly shaken, and will be perfectly restored presently. You, Mr. Carter, are somewhat of an invalid, aren't you?"

"I am recovering from a wound, that is all," he replied. "You had a narrow escape, princess."

"Yes. Wasn't it terrible? And poor Lady Doris! And Larry! What can have happened to them, do you suppose?"

"Don't *you* know, princess?"

"I know nothing at all, Mr. Carter, save that suddenly, without any warning, there was a great shock. I was hurled, I don't know how far away, and fell, I think, in the midst of some bushes. The next thing that I knew was that I heard the approach of another automobile, and, supposing that everybody was killed or injured but myself, I scrambled out somehow and ran forward to meet it. Mr. Chickering Carter has doubtless told you what happened after that."

"Yes. But surely——"

"Surely what, Mr. Carter?"

"You know, do you not, whether the wreck was caused by an accident to your own machine, or if another one ran into you?"

"I don't. I haven't an idea. Neither has Irma."

"Who?"

"My friend Mademoiselle Susine. Her given name is Irma. We were seated side by side in the tonneau—perhaps you will remember—and I was leaning forward in an effort to fasten the lacing of one of my shoes when the accident happened. She had just leaned forward, also, to offer her assistance when the crash came. Neither of us were looking. Our heads were down; and pouf! we were in the air and everything was blank. It is a wonder that we weren't all instantly killed. However——"

"Well?"

"If there had been another automobile, that would have been wrecked, also, wouldn't it?"

"It would seem so—yes."

"Or the people in it would have stood by to assist you," said Chick.

"I have thought of that," said the princess, "and only one explanation occurs to me."

"What is that?" asked the detective.

"Why, if there *was* another machine—if there *was* a collision and the other automobile *was* able to continue on its way, it is *possible*—isn't it?—that Larry and Lady Doris were so severely injured that it was thought best to speed away with them at once, to a hospital, or to a doctor?"

"But nobody with any sense would go away like that and leave you three women without any care whatever," said Chick.

"N-no. It doesn't seem so, does it? However, people get sadly rattled sometimes."

"All the same, it isn't likely."

"I don't think so, either. But how else are you going to explain the disappearance of Larry Hamilton and his fiancée?"

Nick shook his head in perplexity. Then he asked:

"What does the doctor say about Mrs. Aldershot, princess?"

"He hasn't said anything yet; at least, he had not when I left them. But he looked very grave indeed."

"And your companion—Miss Susine?"

"Oh, Irma is coming around all right. She's a bit nervous, you know, and she feels the shock of the thing rather more than I do. But she received no real injury."

"You are both very fortunate, princess."

"Yes. Aren't we? I think I was born lucky, as far as accidents are concerned. I have been in several, but I have never sustained an injury—that really counted as such."

"Will you pardon me, princess, if I ask a very personal question?" asked Nick.

"Certainly. I think you are privileged to do so. What is it?"

"I have noticed two or three times that you have referred to my friend Hamilton as Larry, which would indicate that you are also an old friend of his; and yet, I have never happened to hear him mention Princess Sorosis."

She laughed lightly.

"That isn't a question at all," she replied. "It is only the nucleus of one. Larry and I are indeed very old friends. We have known each other on and off since childhood. I was Laura Bullard, then; but eight years ago I made a mistake that is rather common to American girls who travel much abroad."

"Yes?" said Nick.

"I married a prince—a Russian prince, whose name was neither Russian, nor Italian, nor French, as far as I have been able to determine; and yet, I am forced to bear it—until I decide to take another, that is. The prince is—fortunately—dead."

The detective did not feel that he was called upon to respond to this somewhat remarkable statement, and presently she continued:

"We—Irma and I—arrived in the city only yesterday, and I happened to encounter Larry in the corridor of the hotel last evening. We were, of course, delighted to meet again, and in his impulsive way he told me all about his approaching wedding, and invited us to take the ride with them to-day."

"Thank you," said Nick. "You are an American girl, then, who thought it wise to marry a foreign nobleman."

"Yes; and he was almost eighty. Do you wonder that I was relieved when he—when he decided to leave me a widow?"

"No; but I do rather wonder that you refer to the circumstance so frankly."

"Oh, well, that is my way—here comes the doctor, Mr. Carter."

Nick turned at once to greet the doctor, but he saw instantly that something serious had happened, and he rose to his feet again.

"What is it, doctor?" he asked.

"Mrs. Aldershot—is—dead," he replied.

Before Nick Carter could reply to this astounding information, the princess uttered a little cry, leaped to her feet, and fled into the house.

"Dead?" exclaimed Nick, then. "This is terrible, doctor."

"It is terrible—but it is true," responded the physician. "She died without recovering consciousness."

CHAPTER III.

THE WRECK ON THE ROAD.

During an hour after that the telephone was kept busy, but by the end of that time all necessary preliminary arrangements concerning the sudden death of Mrs. Aldershot had been made. Then the detective sought out the princess and her companion, and said to them:

"I hope, ladies, that you will remain my guests until the afternoon. My assistant will take you to the hotel in the automobile before night, if you think you can trust yourselves to one of them again. We are going now to the scene of the wreck."

They acquiesced, and the detective drove away with Chick.

Chick had not overdrawn the appearance of the wreck, as Nick quickly saw when they arrived upon the spot.

The whole machine was torn apart and twisted as if it had been through a fire, or a terrible explosion; and this latter Nick soon determined was exactly what had happened.

"Chick," he said, almost at once, "there has been an explosion here. What do you suppose can have happened?"

"It looks to me as if a dynamite-cartridge had been set off under the machine," replied the assistant.

"It does indeed; but, of course, that is nonsense."

"Of course."

"Could the gasoline-tank have exploded?"

"I never heard that one exploded—did you?—unless somebody was under the machine with a lighted match, or a candle."

"Nor I."

"And this accident happened when the machine was in motion."

"All the same," said Nick, "there has been an explosion. Look at the thing. You can see it with half an eye. I don't see how such a thing could be possible. Do you?"

"It might be," suggested Chick, "that a piece of iron dropped down, caught on something, and struck a spark, like flint against steel. There might have been a leakage somewhere, and then two explosions. The first one a small one, which ripped open the tank, and then the big one, following so close together that——"

"That seems to be the only way to acount for it," admitted Nick.

"Look at the ground under the wreck," said Chick. "If that don't look like the effect of dynamite, you can shoot me."

"It certainly does. But—we are confronted with a greater mystery than that."

"We certainly are, Nick."

"I wish I were stronger," sighed the detective.

"Never you mind that. Just sit right where you are and tell me what to do. I'll do it."

"I'm not going to sit down idly, but I will leave the hardest work to you."

"Well?"

"I need not tell you what to do. Make a thorough search all around here. In the road, each way, along the sides of the road, in the bushes—everywhere. I'll give all my attention to the machine."

Chick remained perfectly still. Then he said:

"Say, Nick?"

"Well?"

"This wasn't an accident—that is, in the general acceptation of the word."

"I am quite well aware of that, Chick. If it were, Hamilton and Doris would not be missing. They or their dead bodies would be somewhere around here."

"That is what I meant. Now, has it occurred to you that possibly it was dynamite, after all?"

"Yes. It has."

"A stick of the stuff might have been placed in the middle of the road under a flat stone and a wire concealed under some dirt might have led away into those bushes where somebody with a battery was concealed."

The detective nodded his head.

"I have thought of that," he said. "It is a terrible thing to suppose—but it seems to be the explanation of this accident."

"Was it Madge, do you suppose?"

"It could not well have been anybody else. It was Madge, or it was somebody who was in her employ."

"What a fiendish thing to do!"

Nick did not reply.

"The wonder is," continued Chick, "that everybody in the automobile was not instantly killed."

"And the likelihood," said Nick, "is that Hamilton and Doris were killed."

"Do you really think that?"

"Look at the wreck for your answer."

"Yes; but also look at the fact that two of the passengers escaped without injury, and that a third lived a considerable time after the explosion."

"You forget," said Nick, "that the three you mention were in the tonneau. The car is—was a Mercedes. It was very heavy and strong. It looks as if the explosion was directly under the forward part of the machine."

"The cartridge must have been touched off the instant the car was over it."

"Yes; and it doesn't seem possible that either Doris or Hamilton could have escaped. The fact that they are missing——"

Chick interrupted.

"The fact that they are missing," he said, "leads me to suppose that they were not killed—either of them. They might have been severely injured; but if they had been dead, they would have been left here with the others."

Nick shook his head in doubt.

"I don't know," he said. "We will have to find out all that. Now, go ahead and see what information you can pick up around here. Find out what the ground will tell you. Leave me to think."

"I want to say something else first."

"What is it?"

"If it were Madge, how could she have got here in time for this? How could she have known of the intended trip out here, which Doris did not know about herself until last evening?"

"I give it up—for the present," replied the detective.

"There would have been some planning to do, even if she did know about the trip," insisted Chick.

"Yes; but the news in the papers might have been belated. She may have made her escape from prison several days ago, and the news of it only just leaked out."

"That is true."

"I think it is the fact. I received a warning letter from her this morning."

"You did?"

"Yes. Mailed in New York last night. You see, she lost no time in getting on the ground."

"What a human devil she is!"

"Go on, now, Chick, and look around you. We can discuss these things later."

Thus abjured, Chick began his search, while the detective seated himself on the bank near the wrecked machine, and gave himself up to a study of the incident.

The wrecked Mercedes was at the side of the road and was keeled over on one side. It was torn and wrenched and crumpled and twisted out of all semblance to its original self.

There was a cavity blown in the road where it had attempted to pass; bits of iron and steel and aluminum were scattered about everywhere.

That was all.

It was more than half an hour before Chick returned and seated himself beside his chief, and, strangely enough, there had been no one to pass them since their arrival on the scene.

"Well," said the detective, "what did you find?"

"Nothing."

"No footprints, or tracks of any kind? In the road or elsewhere?"

"Nothing that could even suggest anything for us."

"No blood anywhere?"

"No."

"Nor bits of clothing?"

"No."

"Or any place where another machine has been turned around?"

"No."

"What do you make of it all, Chick?"

"I make nothing of it. I am as blind as a bat about it."

"If we are right about that dynamite cartridge, there must have been at least one person waiting here—probably more than one—concealed in those bushes."

"Yes."

"And since Doris and Larry have been carried away, dead or alive, there must have been a conveyance to carry them."

"Yes."

"Well, couldn't you find anything?"

"Not a thing."

"I wish I had the strength to climb around through those bushes."

"Look here, Nick, if you had twice the necessary strength you could not find a thing. I have been very thorough. I haven't left a spot unsearched."

"Forgive me, Chick. I didn't mean it exactly that way."

"I know. You would like to look at it all with your own eyes. But, all the same, Nick, believe me, you would find nothing."

"All right, Chick."

"You know Madge Morley, and so do I."

"Yes."

"We both know how infernally expert she is in anything she attempts to do. Now, if she was here in person, superintending this affair, she had plenty of time after it happened to cover up her tracks—and she did it."

"Eh?"

"Down the road a little way there is a place where the roadway has been swept over with a piece of brush. Of course, if we are to admit to ourselves that she was here, she did that."

Nick nodded.

"And that is all I can find," added Chick. "It makes a point, however."

"Yes," said Nick. "It makes the point that if she was careful enough to do that sweeping with a piece of brush, she also took good care to go thoroughly over the ground and see that no telltale marks were left behind."

"Exactly. That is why I said that I could find nothing."

"There is one murder to her credit, anyhow," said Nick solemnly, "and if I live, I will bring her to book for it. A better woman never lived than Mrs. Aldershot. God, Chick! It is terrible. And Doris! Poor girl. To-morrow was to have been her wedding-day; and now——"

"Brace up, old man! Doris may not be much hurt, after all."

Suddenly the detective started to his feet, and Chick looked at him in surprise.

"What is it, Nick?" he asked.

"I've got an idea, Chick. I'm not going to tell even you what it is. But I want you to do one thing for me."

"What?"

"Take me back to the house at once. When you get me there, carry me in. Give out the impression that I fell and hurt myself severely—opened the wound again, or something of the kind—and then send to New York for Doctor Stag. Tell him that it is a matter of life or death with me that he comes at once."

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER MAKES A DOUBLE PLAY.

That closing remark of Nick's recited at the end of the last chapter sufficiently explains how it happened that when the automobile arrived again at the house, Chick called hastily for Joseph, after which, between them, they carried the detective to his room.

The princess happened to see them just as they were ascending the stairs, and she hastened forward to inquire what was the matter.

"I'll be down again in a moment and tell you all about it, princess," Chick replied to her in a low tone. "In the meantime, if you should happen to see the housekeeper, if you will send her to Mr. Carter's room, I'll be much obliged."

Nick's eyes had remained closed during this short colloquy, and he seemed hardly to take breath at all; nor did he change his attitude until the door of his own room had closed behind him.

Then he stood upon his feet and smiled into the tear-stained face of Joseph, who had supposed until that instant that his master was really down and out.

"Joseph," he said, in a low tone, "you can go below, please, and collect some hot clothes and any other old thing that you think a man might need who is in a dangerous condition, resulting from the opening of old wounds. And if anybody should ask you, you are to give the impression that I have had a serious fall. I am very bad. That's all."

"But, sir, there is really nothing the matter, then?"

"Not a thing in life, Joseph. I'm just playing a part, and I want you and the housekeeper to help me. That's all. You need not explain to her, however. You can let me do that."

"Yes, sir."

Joseph went out, and thus left Nick and his assistant together.

"Look here, Nick," said the assistant, "would you mind telling me what it is all about?"

"Yes. I would. I don't mean to tell you more than the mere fact that I am doing this for a purpose, and that I intend to keep that purpose to myself until I am assured that—well, that I am right."

"Humph!" said Chick. "How bad off are you going to be? And how long is it going to last? Will you tell me that?"

"It's going to be pretty bad, and it's going to last some time, Chick."

"You're not going to pretend to peg out, are you?"

"I haven't decided on that point—yet. It is possible, however. We have got to meet fire with fire, lad."

"Do you mind telling me just exactly what you mean by that expression?"

"I mean that if Madge Morley could be entirely convinced that I was not in the running at all, she would be a whole lot easier to find than if she supposed I was looking for her. That is all I will tell you at present. Leave the rest until I have seen Doctor Stag."

"Whew! That reminds me; you want me to telephone for him, don't you?"

"Yes. As soon as Joseph returns. It won't do for you to leave me alone."

Chick grinned. At the same moment there came a gentle tap against the door, and Nick, who had been rapidly divesting himself of his clothing, now threw himself into the bed and drew the sheet over himself.

The assistant opened the door, and the housekeeper entered.

There were tears in her eyes, too, until Nick opened his eyes and smiled at her.

"I did not know that you all thought so much of me, Jannette," he said. "Dry your eyes, woman, and brace up. There is nothing the matter with me at all. I am only playing it."

"Oh! I am *so* glad!" she replied—and wept the more.

"You may remain with me now, while Chick telephones for the doctor," continued the detective; and when Chick had gone, he added: "I wish everybody in the house, including the other servants, to suppose that I am in a very bad way. Will you help me to carry it out?"

"Certainly, sir."

"You may pile it on just as thickly as you like with the princess and her friend. They will be sure to carry the news to the city."

"But what is it all about, Mr. Carter?"

"That is a question which I must not answer just now. What I particularly wish of you at present is that you will do a little flying around, as if something were really the matter. Your wit will tell you what to do; only make it appear as bad as you can."

"Yes, sir."

Joseph entered the room now, loaded down with towels, lint, hot water, and various other articles that he had collected; and he was as solemn as an owl with it all, too.

By Nick's directions, the curtains were drawn and the room darkened, after which Jannette and Joseph, by turns, hastened to and fro through the house, getting "things" and attending to various other mysterious errands which added to the feeling that had been created.

Truly, it seemed to be a day of accidents for that house.

It was a long time before Chick returned to say that the doctor was already on his way out, coming in a fast automobile, and he added:

"The princess cornered me as I was coming up-stairs. She seems to be greatly concerned about you, Nick."

"Tell me what she said."

"She asked about forty questions before I could reply to one."

"What did you tell her?"

"I said that I thought it must be something about your old wound; that it was very serious, and that I had just telephoned for New York's greatest doctor. She wanted to know who that was, and I told her Stag."

"Anything more, Chick?"

"Yes. I got a telephone from the station. The people are on their way here after the body of Mrs. Aldershot. They will be here in about twenty minutes. I had better go down, eh? Don't you think so?"

"Yes. Don't forget, also, that you are to take the princess and her friend to the city."

"Do you think that I had better do that—now?"

"I particularly wish you to do it—now."

"Eh? Why?"

"It is part of the game."

"Have they anything to do with the game, Nick?"

"Not directly, perhaps. But it is part of the game. Ask them to wait until the doctor arrives. They'll do it."

"You seem to be mighty certain of what they'll do."

"I think I am, as far as that part of it is concerned."

"I'd like to know what in blazes you are driving at."

"You'll know in good time."

"If I were a couple of beautiful young women—— "

"You couldn't very well be *one* beautiful young woman, to say nothing of being two."

"I wouldn't want to hang around where I had been blown up with dynamite—and otherwise hoodooed."

"Possibly not; but, then, you are not Princess Sorosis, nor yet Mademoiselle Susine. Go along down, now, and talk to the police, and send Jannette to me."

"What shall I say to them?"

"Anything that occurs to you. It makes no difference to me. Hold on, though! I've got another idea."

"I hope it's less trouble than this one—and more lucid."

"It is. I want you to tell the princess that Joseph will take them home in the automobile."

"*Joseph!* Confound it, Nick, he don't know a crank-shaft from a spark-plug."

"The Joseph who takes them home will."

"Eh? Great Scott! Do you mean to make up as Joseph and do it yourself?"

"That's the idea."

"But, Nick, are you strong enough?"

"Strong enough? I'm strong enough to lift the world after what has happened this day."

"I don't wonder, old man."

"Instead of sending Jannette to me, send Joseph. Tell the princess and her friend that the Joseph who will take them to the city is one of the best chauffeurs in the world. Tell her that you find that your duty is to remain here, at least for the present. Go ahead, now."

"I wish you would take me into your confidence, Nick, and tell me what you are playing for; won't you?"

"I am playing to win; and I will win, what's more!"

Chick was forced to be satisfied with that answer; and presently Joseph entered the room.

"Joseph," said the detective, rising from the bed, "this is a day of events, isn't it?"

"Terrible events, sir. What with the awful accident on the road, the disappearance of Mr. Hamilton and Miss Doris, and now your own sudden taking down——"

"That will about do for you, Joe. I have got some very important work for you to do."

"Yes, sir."

"Lock the door—but wait. There is Jannette, now. Tell her to take a chair and sit outside the door and to say that I am not to be disturbed by anybody on any account. Good! Now, lock the door and come with me."

The detective led the way into another and a smaller room, which had no outlet upon the hall, and which was liberally provided with articles that Nick wished to use.

"Joseph," said Nick, "I am going to take your place for awhile. I am going to become Joseph, the valet, and you are going to take my place—in the bed. See?"

"Yes, sir."

The reply was given with perfect confidence, for Joseph had long since ceased to feel surprise at anything his master said or did.

"Sit over there," said Nick; and when the valet had complied, Nick drew a standing-mirror before him and began to work.

Nick Carter knows the art of making up his face to perfection, and Joseph's smoothly shaven countenance was not difficult for him to reproduce.

He had to build out his cheeks considerably; he was obliged to make his own straight nose over again into a Roman one; and there were many other little things which had to be done before he was quite transformed.

But after working diligently for an hour, it was done, and save for the clothing there were two Josephs in the room.

"Now, Joseph," said the detective, "just to be on the safe side of things, I will make some alterations in your appearance. I'll make you enough like me so that the difference won't be noticed in a darkened room. After that, we'll be ready to act."

Twenty minutes later he said:

"Now, Joseph, take off your clothes and get into that bed. I am going to put your clothes on and leave mine where yours are."

"Yes, sir."

When it was all done and Joseph was safely packed away in the bed, looking not unlike his master in that darkened room, Nick—as Joseph—stepped to the hall door and opened it.

"Come in, Jannette," he said, in Joseph's softest tones. "The master would like to speak to you."

She did not suspect the change that had been made, but passed him by at once and went to the bedside.

Even then, for a moment, she was not enlightened; not until Nick remarked, in his natural voice:

"I think the disguise will do very well, if Jannette's sharp eyes did not discover the fraud."

Then she wheeled upon him, with an exclamation of astonishment; but Nick laughed softly, and, turning about, left the room.

CHAPTER V.

JOSEPH'S COAT OF MANY COLORS.

When the detective—in the character of Joseph—descended to the front of the house and passed out upon the veranda, he arrived there just after the departure of the people who had come to take away the body of Mrs. Aldershot.

It need not be said here how sincerely the detective regretted the necessity which forbade him from attending to the duties in person, but he had decided upon the course he was to follow, and he would not deviate from it by the breadth of a hair.

Chick was standing with the princess and her friend, upon the veranda, watching the disappearing carriages, but he turned when the supposed Joseph appeared; turned and stared at him, for Chick was not at all sure, even in the bright light of day, that the person he saw was not Joseph.

Nick stepped quickly forward toward them, and said:

"Excuse me, Mr. Chick, but the master would like to see you at once, if you please."

Chick turned and hurried away, and Nick was on the point of withdrawing, also, when the princess addressed him.

"Wait a moment, Joseph. That is your name, isn't it?" she said.

"Yes, madam."

"Mr. Chickering Carter tells me that you are to take us to the city in the automobile."

Nick bowed.

"I have not received the order, madam," he said, "and I had supposed that my master would require my presence here; but if such are the orders, it will be a great honor for me to act once more as chauffeur for a princess."

"Upon my word, Joseph, you are quite a Chesterfield."

"Thank you, madam!"

"Are you quite competent as a chauffeur?"

"Entirely so, madam."

"I am told that we may start as soon as the doctor arrives. Have you any idea how soon that will be?"

"I should say that he ought to be here within an hour, now. Luncheon will be served at two o'clock. Perhaps we could start at once after that."

"Thank you, Joseph. I would like to do so, if possible."

The detective turned away, then. He did not wish to be too presumptuous.

And the good doctor did arrive within the hour; and Nick was at the steps to receive him—although the physician had no idea that it was Nick.

"Hello, Joseph, you old rascal!" he exclaimed, in his cheery voice. "What in the world has happened now? Couldn't you keep that master of yours still for a moment?"

"No, sir. Quite impossible, doctor. He would go out, after that terrible accident happened this morning, and——"

"What accident? What do you mean?"

"Mr. Hamilton's automobile, sir. It was wrecked on the road. Mrs. Aldershot and these two ladies were passengers. Mrs. Aldershot died soon afterward, from the——"

"Good God! What are you telling me?"

"It is quite true, sir. Mrs. Aldershot——"

"Yes, yes, yes. You said that. And what of Lady Doris and Hamilton?"

"If you will listen, doctor, I will try to tell you. Perhaps, however, these ladies could explain it better than I. They were present."

"Thank you, Joseph. Go to your master's room and let him know that I have come. Now, ladies, if you will permit me, I am Doctor Stag. Will you be good enough to tell me what that fellow is talking about?"

That "fellow," as the doctor called him, was passing rapidly along the veranda toward the door; but he did not ascend the stairs. Instead, he passed inside the parlor and halted near an open window, through which he could hear all that passed between the doctor and the ladies. He had a wish to hear that story once again from the lips of the princess.

"Thank you, doctor," the princess was saying, as he took his place near the window. "I am the Princess Sorosis, once Miss Laura Bullard, of Baltimore. This is my friend Mademoiselle Susine."

The doctor bowed.

"And now, what about the accident?" he asked impatiently. "Is it true that my dear friend Mrs. Aldershot was killed?"

"Quite true, doctor. Isn't it terrible?"

"Horrible. Please tell me about it, princess."

"The great trouble is, doctor, I do not know much about it myself. I was inside the tonneau at the time. I was looking down—had been looking down for some moments in fact, so I do not in the least know what did happen. All that I know is——"

"Do you mean to tell me that the wreck I saw out here

beside the road was Hamilton's machine? Why, it is torn to pieces."

"Quite," she admitted.

"Was it a collision?"

"I don't know. Something happened; I don't know what. I was hurled into the air and lost my senses. When I recovered, I heard another motor approaching, and I ran to meet it. It proved to be Mr. Chickering Carter. He went back with me, and we found Mrs. Aldershot half-under the car. She had a wound at the back of her head. She lived about an hour and a half after that."

"But Doris! Hamilton! What of them?"

"Nobody knows. They had disappeared."

"*Dis-disappeared?* What the dev—— I beg your pardon. Perhaps you'll explain."

"I cannot. I wish I could."

"Why, good heavens! They must be around there somewhere!"

"But they are not. Mr. Carter and his assistant went there to look for them. That is how Mr. Carter hurt himself so that he had to send for you."

"Yes. And here I am forgetting all about him. I'll see you again, ladies. Excuse me."

The doctor hurried along the veranda and was met at the door by the supposed Joseph, who conducted him in utter silence to the darkened room—and followed him inside.

The doctor crossed rapidly and lightly to the bedside and seized upon the pulse of the man who was lying there.

"Bless my soul, Nick!" he exclaimed, after a moment. "You have got a pulse like a horse;" and Nick, standing behind him, burst into a laugh despite the state of his feelings.

"That is Joseph, doctor," he said. "I am standing behind you."

Doctor Stag wheeled around like a flash.

"What does this mean?" he demanded angrily. "Is this some hideous joke? I won't stand that sort of thing even from you, Nick Carter."

"It is no joke, doctor," explained Nick. "I supposed you would be angry at first; but I have such a good excuse for what I have done and for deceiving you that—well, I know you will forgive me when you have heard it."

"I'm not so sure about that, Nick Carter. It is evident that you have brought me way out here on a wild-goose chase when I have a hundred patients who are anxiously awaiting me. It is almost a crime to do a thing like that, Nick."

"I know it, doctor; but I did not hesitate. Will you listen to me?"

"Yes."

"What you heard down-stairs about the accident is all true. The body of Mrs. Aldershot was taken from this house a little more than an hour ago. What may have become of Hamilton and Doris I do not know. If they were killed, their bodies were carried away to conceal that fact. If they are alive, they were abducted to prevent the marriage from taking place to-morrow."

"What infernal nonsense are you talking? Who would abduct——"

"Madge Morley."

"She's in prison; that is——"

"No, she isn't. See if you can refrain from interrupting me for a moment."

"All right. Go on."

"In the first place, there was no accident and no collision. The motor was wrecked with dynamite."

"Good heavens!"

"It is true. Somebody waited in the bushes beside the road, ready to shoot the cartridge the instant the car should be over it. It must have——"

"How do you know about this?"

"I've been there looking over the ground."

"I saw it, too. The machine looks like a heap of junk."

"That is all it is now."

"Now, will you tell me what the devil you have assumed this disguise for? And what it is all about, anyhow?"

"I have fixed things so that I can be too ill to see anybody. It may be that I will give out that I am dead, before I am through with the case."

"I'm blowed if you will! Not through me, anyhow."

"Well, you can bring me so near to it that it will be a toss-up whether I am to get well or not, can't you?"

"I feel mightily like doing that, right now."

"I'm not joking, doctor. I'm in dead earnest."

"Yes. I can do it, all right—if you'll convince me that it is a wise move."

"Doctor, I want Madge Morley to be convinced that I am not able to get out of my bed. I want her to know, in her own mind, that I am not in a condition to think about her, even, much less take her trail."

"Are you sure in *your* own mind that she is the author of this outrage?"

"Perfectly sure."

"Why do you begin the masquerade here? And why do you include that princess and her pretty young friend in your deception?"

"There are a good many replies to those questions, but one will suffice. They will be interviewed about the accident, as soon as they arrive at their hotel. I wish them to tell all about me, also."

"Humph! But why are you playing Joseph?"

"For one reason, so that I can get about. For another, so that I can take the princess and mademoiselle to the

city in the Peerless car. I want to hear them talk that accident over between themselves."

"You don't suppose that they are holding anything back, do you?"

"I won't say that I suppose that. But they are likely to remember things when they are alone together, which were forgotten when they were talking to others."

"I don't see the point. Possibly you do, Nick."

"Yes. I see it."

"Now, what is it that you wish me to do?"

"I want you to make out that there is about one chance in a thousand that I will get well, and I want you to give the most stringent orders that I am not to be allowed to see anybody but the nurse and you. You can fix the details to suit yourself."

"Nick, before you are through with me you will make me the star liar of the universe."

"But you'll do this, doctor? You will help me to find Doris? You will——"

"Of course I'll do it, you—you——. Jove! Nick, how I would like to punch your head."

"It wouldn't be my head; it would be Joseph's, if you hit me now."

"Joseph," said the doctor, turning again toward the bed, "what do you think of this master of yours, anyhow?"

"He's not my master now, sir; he's my valet," was the calm reply.

CHAPTER VI.

A BLOODHOUND IN THE GAME.

It was half-past two o'clock that afternoon when Nick Carter, in the character of his own valet, Joseph, climbed under the wheel of the big Peerless car, prepared to take the princess and her companion to the city.

Chick and the doctor assisted the ladies into the car; and then, as they were about to start, the princess said to Doctor Stag:

"I would be very glad, doctor, if you could find time to call upon me at the Hotel Mammoth and let me know how Mr. Carter is getting along. I am terribly shocked by the events of the day."

"I do not doubt it, princess. It is a wonder that you and the mademoiselle bear up as well as you do; but as for my calling upon you, I am a very busy man, you know. I get very little opportunity for social obligations."

"And you, Mr. Chickering Carter? Might I not expect a call from you?" she asked.

"With the greatest of pleasure, princess—when I have the opportunity. I doubt, however, if I shall go to the city very soon. My duty seems to be here at present."

"I suppose so. I may call you over the telephone?"

"Certainly. At any time."

And then the motor was driven away while the doctor and Chick stood looking after it until it disappeared down the highway.

"She is a beautiful woman, Chick," said the physician, still with his eyes fixed somewhat dreamily upon that spot in the road where the automobile had disappeared.

Chick nodded his head somewhat curtly.

"They are both beautiful," he said.

"I was wondering——" said the doctor; and stopped.

"Yes?" replied Chick.

"I was wondering what it is about that princess that impresses me as being so familiar. I am quite sure that I have never met her before, either as the princess, or as Miss Laura Bullard—which, she tells me, was her maiden name; but, all the same, there is something of memory connected in my mind with her face and manner. The same idea applies to her companion, too; Mademoiselle Susine. Who are they, Chick?"

"I know just as much about them as you do, doctor."

The doctor was silent a moment, and then he said:

"I wonder what sort of a bee Nick has got in his bonnet, now. What is he driving at? Eh?"

"Again I am as ignorant as you are, doctor."

"Do you mean to tell me that he didn't even take you into his confidence?"

"Just that."

"Humph! I don't know why I forgave him for working me into it the way he did. If it were any other person of my acquaintance, I'd scratch him off my visiting-list on the spot. Confound his cheek, anyhow! And now I've got to take that ride back to the city alone."

"On the contrary, doctor, if you will wait a little longer, I will keep you company."

"What! You will go back with me?"

"Yes."

"I thought it was part of the game that you were to remain here?"

"So it was; only I am not going to sit in at that particular game."

"Eh?"

"Nick has gone off on a plan of his own—and for almost the first time in his life without taking me into his confidence, so I have made up my mind that I'll do a little work on my own hook."

"Good! What are you going to do? I'll help you."

"Come along, then, doctor. I must see Joseph and Jannette first."

The doctor was on the point of following Chick into the house when his attention was attracted to Pedro, the bloodhound, which was trotting toward them along the veranda, carrying something in his mouth.

"What has that dog got, Chick?" asked the physician.

Chick halted and waited for Pedro to come to him, and he took a long black sleeve-glove from the intelligent animal's mouth.

"I think," he said, "that it is a glove that belonged to the princess."

"Without doubt," replied the doctor, examining it.

Chick was in turn examining it when the doctor said:

"I think, Chick, that the dog would like to tell you something about that glove if only he knew how to talk."

"He can talk, doctor—in a manner that is entirely his own. He is the most intelligent animal I ever saw."

"What do you mean—that he can talk?"

"Watch, and I will show you."

Chick took the glove in his hand again, and, holding it a few feet above the dog's head, he said:

"Pedro, attention!"

Pedro raised his head and fixed his eyes upon the glove.

"Where did you find it, Pedro?" asked Chick.

The dog turned about, as if he perfectly understood what had been said to him, and trotted along the piazza toward the front of the house, turned the corner, passed along the front, turned again, and so went along the north side of the building until he came to a rose-trellis that extended from the ground almost to the roof of the building. At the surface of the ground this trellis was fully ten feet away from the foundation, but in reach ing upward it formed an acute angle with the side of the building until it reached to the cornice.

Pedro trotted to a spot that was directly underneath the trellis and about midway between its base and the foundation of the house, and there he squatted on his haunches and looked steadily at a spot of ground that was directly in front of him.

"He is telling me now that he picked that glove up right there," said Chick.

"Humph!" said the doctor. "That is a trifle odd, isn't it? What the devil do you suppose the princess was doing around here, Chick?"

"Probably strolling about the grounds. There is rather an odd coincidence connected with the spot where the glove was lost, however."

"Eh? What is it?"

"That trellis goes up directly past one of the windows to the room where Nick is supposed to be lying very ill, just now."

"Oh! Hadn't you better ask the dog to do a little more talking?"

"That is just what I intend to do. Come here, Pedro."

The dog obeyed him at once, and he held the glove in his hand and touched it against Pedro's nose three times.

"Now, Pedro," he said. "*Vamanos!*"

"What the blazes——" began the doctor.

"It is Spanish," said Chick. "Pedro understands Spanish better than he does English. If you will keep an eye on him now he will tell you presently everywhere that the princess went while she was out in the grounds. Look at him now. He is beginning at first principles, you see."

Pedro was trotting slowly toward the veranda with his nose in the air, but the moment he arrived at the steps he stopped, and lowering his nose to the ground he uttered a short, sharp bark, and came again toward the trellis.

"You mean, I suppose," said the doctor, "that he is starting at the point where *she* made her start?"

"Yes," replied Chick. "If you will watch him now he will tell you everywhere she went during the time she was strolling around the grounds."

"I don't know why we care about that, Chick."

"Oh, we will just give the dog a little exercise."

Pedro circled two flower-beds; he followed one path to an arbor, passed through it and returned toward the house; then he went again to the edge of the steps of the veranda; then he turned again and went directly to the trellis; he passed beyond it and returned, and then pausing directly in front of it he raised his huge body and putting his paws against the second cross-bar and whined.

"Could anything be plainer than that?" asked Chick, with a smile.

"What in the world does it mean?" asked the doctor.

"It means quite a number of things," replied Chick. "For one thing, it means that I am catching on to what Nick is up to; it means for another, that Princess Sorosis, for some reason best known to herself, either attempted to climb that trellis, or at least she stood against it with her hand upon that cross-bar."

"She couldn't have known that Nick was in that room, up there, could she?"

"I don't know that."

"And supposing she did know it, do the actions of the dog lead you to suppose that she made an attempt to see or hear what was going on inside that room?"

"Under any other circumstances that is exactly what they would indicate, doctor."

"What in the world would be her object?"

"I cannot even make a guess at that at present."

Chick had gone forward now, and he spoke to the dog to let him know that his duties were over for the present; then he carefully examined the trellis; and when at last he turned away, the doctor asked:

"What did you find out, Chick?"

"Nothing, doctor; nothing."

"Are you going to get ready to take me back to the city presently; or, rather, to go back with me?"

"I'll be ready in less than half an hour. Sit down on the veranda and smoke until I have prepared myself, will you?"

Chick hurried to the room where Joseph was occupying Nick's bed.

"Get up, Joseph," he said. "You may return to your

proper person now. You and Jannette are to carry out the idea that your master is in this room and under the care of a nurse. Also that he is very ill—much too ill to see anybody or to receive any messages. I hope you understand."

"Yes, sir."

"I am going to New York; I will call you up on the phone from time to time. I must put everything here in your hands and Jannette's."

"I will attend to everything, sir," was the reply.

Chick's next act was to busy himself with a disguise, and when at last he was ready to accompany the doctor he had made himself look exactly like another physician who might have accompanied Stag on his call.

"I suppose, doctor," he said, "you will not object to an extra passenger, will you? I mean one besides myself."

"No; who is it?"

"Pedro."

"Eh? The bloodhound?"

"Yes. I find that I shall likely need his services in the city; and also, as we go along, I want to let him nose around that wreck for a little while—ten minutes, say."

"All right, Chick. Whatever you say, goes."

And so the race back to the city was begun, with Pedro for an extra passenger.

But as they drew up at the scene of the wreck, Chick jumped out and called the dog after him.

Once again he exhibited the glove and pressed it against Pedro's nose.

"Remember, Pedro!" he said then.

CHAPTER VII.

CHICK FINDS AN ASTOUNDING CLUE.

As soon as Chick had set the dog to work he climbed back into the car beside the doctor to watch him.

"I don't know what you expect to find out by this business," said the doctor. "We know already that the princess was here at the time of the accident. The dog can't tell you anything new, can he?"

"That is what I wish to ascertain—if he can tell us something new. You heard the story of the princess, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And you remember it just as she told it to you?"

"Certainly."

"Well, keep it in mind, if you please."

"Chick," said the doctor, "of course, I am not a detective. I don't know in the least what you are driving at, but I wish you would tell me one thing."

"What?"

"Are you entertaining some sort of suspicion against the princess?"

"Yes," was the uncompromising reply.

"What sort of suspicion?"

"Doctor, that is just what I don't know myself. If I did, I wouldn't be fussing around here. I suppose if you should go right down to the root of the thing, I really haven't a shadow of a suspicion of any sort about me. But all the same I can't get it out of my head that the woman is not exactly what she represented herself. I wish you would try to be satisfied with that explanation, for the present."

"I will, Chick. I won't ask another question."

While they were talking, Pedro was working; and although Chick's attention seemed to be devoted to the doctor, it was really riveted upon the dog.

After ten minutes of steady work, the dog stopped in his tracks, raised his head, and looked directly toward Chick, wagged his tail, and uttered a short bark.

"All through, Pedro?" asked Chick. "All right. Jump in."

The two men rode along in silence for some time after that, and then Chick asked a question.

"Did you watch Pedro, doctor?" he said.

"Yes."

"Did you compare, in your mind, the places you saw him trail out with his nose, with those places where the princess' feet are supposed to have trodden, according to her story?"

"Yes."

"See any difference?"

"There was only just one thing about it that struck me as strange, Chick."

"I suppose it was the same thing that impressed me; but you tell what it was, doctor."

"The princess did not say anything about going back into the woods at the north side of the road, apparently just for the purpose of walking around that big boulder of a rock that stands there."

"No," said Chick. "She forgot to mention that."

"Is that the same thing that you noticed?"

"Yes."

"Pedro couldn't have made a mistake, could he?"

"Pedro never makes mistakes, doctor."

"Then it is dead certain that she did walk back into the woods and pass behind that big rock, eh?"

"Just as certain as that you are sitting beside me. Pedro would not have gone there if the trail he was pursuing had not led him there."

"Do you attach any significance to it, Chick?"

"I attach a great deal of significance to it, doctor."

"Will you tell me what it is?"

"Yes. I think that the princess—and her friend and companion as well—were well protected behind that rock when the explosion occurred."

"Good heavens, Chick! What do you mean?"

"Don't you understand me?"

"I am not sure that I understand you correctly. Your words imply that—you cannot mean it, Chick!"

"I do mean it. Go on. What do you think I have implied?"

"Why, man, you have implied that an attack was made upon the people in Hamilton's car, *before* there was any accident at all; *you imply that the Mercedes was blown up afterward and that the princess and her friend stood by and saw it done.*"

"And that is precisely what I meant to imply. That is what Pedro told me. Didn't I inform you that he could talk in a manner that is all his own?"

"You certainly did; but I didn't expect any such story as this."

"Nor I—at the time I said it."

"Tell me in plain words what you mean, Chick."

"I don't know that I can do that. I am not sufficiently clear about it in my own mind."

"Tell me, anyhow."

"Well, doctor, in the first place there is a great mystery about the disappearance of Hamilton and Doris."

"Yes."

"You listen."

"Yes."

"Nick and I figured out that the machine was blown up with a cartridge of dynamite which had been concealed under a flat stone in the middle of the road, and which was connected by wire with a battery which somebody in the bushes stood ready to work when the time came.

"We figured, also, basing our calculations upon the condition in which we found the wreck, that the cartridge must have been exploded at the instant when the front wheels of the car had just passed over it; that is, the force of the explosion was forward of the center."

"Yes."

"We know that there were three persons in the tonneau: they were the princess, Mademoiselle Susine, and Mrs. Aldershot. Mrs. Aldershot was killed, while the other two escaped without a mark on them. The two persons who were in the front of the machine have utterly disappeared, and we do not know whether they were torn to pieces, or if they escaped uninjured."

"Well?"

"Figuring upon the condition of the wreck, it would seem that two persons upon the forward seats at the time of the explosion must have been frightfully maimed and, in fact, torn to pieces. At the very least, they must have been severely wounded."

"I agree with you there."

"There is not one spot of blood anywhere around there. There is not a shoe, a collar, a glove, a piece of a garment, or anything, in fact, around there, to suggest that anybody has been injured, at all. Now, what is your conclusion, doctor?"

"You tell. I am listening to you."

"The natural deduction is that Hamilton and Doris were *not in the car when the explosion occurred;* that the princess and her friend were not in the car at that time, and that, in all probability, Mrs. Aldershot was not there, either."

"Do you mean that they all got out of the car and stood by deliberately waiting for it to be blown up with dynamite?"

"No. That is nonsense."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it appears as if some sort of an attack were made upon the passengers of that car before the machine was blown up. Hamilton was somehow induced to stop the car. One or more of them got out. The attack was made, and during it Mrs. Aldershot received the blow on her head that killed her, while Larry Hamilton and Doris were made prisoners and carried away. *Then*—after that, the dynamite was placed under the car and fired; and, *after that*, Mrs. Aldershot was shoved under the wreck, to lie there until I came along to find her."

"Say, Chick, do you know what you are suggesting?"

"Perfectly well, doctor."

"You are suggesting that Princess Sorosis and Mademoiselle Susine are in league with Madge Morley."

"I am suggesting more than that, doctor."

"What is it?"

"I am suggesting that the princess is Madge Morley herself."

The doctor burst out laughing at that.

"You don't mean to tell me, do you, that Madge Morley could so disguise herself that Nick Carter would not know her?"

"Doctor, she is a woman devil—a woman Satan, if ever there was one. Nobody knows what she is capable of doing. I would not have believed, if you had asked me, that Madge Morley could disguise herself so that I would not know her, to say nothing of Nick Carter; but you and I both saw—in fact, Nick saw it, too—that there was a something familiar about the woman. Do you remember that I told you a little while ago that I was catching onto Nick's reasons for acting as he did?"

"Yes."

"I think now that he had an inkling of the same idea that has occurred to me."

"And that that was the reason why he wished to ride back to New York with those two women?"

"Yes."

"Do you really think he suspected that the princess was Madge?"

"I don't know what he suspected. He didn't tell me. But I do know that he suspected something. I know him well enough for that."

"Then the whole thing, according to your theory, resolves itself to this: That——"

"Wait a minute, doctor; I will tell you just what it resolves itself into, in my mind."

"I wish to Heaven you would, Chick."

"Madge escaped from prison—we don't know exactly when. She hurried to New York, and with her companion——"

"Who do you suspect she is?"

"Wait. She hurried to New York, and put up at the Mammoth. Somehow she managed to impose herself upon Hamilton as an old acquaintance. That would be easy for Madge, and Hamilton is just the one to be hoodwinked by such a thing. The ride in the automobile followed. Madge was determined to stop that marriage. After the short call at Nick's country house, they made the start back."

"And now you are up against it, Chick."

"Am I? Wait. Suppose she watches her opportunity and strikes Mrs. Aldershot on the back of the head with a blackjack while she is riding beside her? Suppose that then she leans forward, and in her most honeyed tones says in Hamilton's ear, 'Please stop the car a moment?' Suppose that the latter he complies with her request she raps him on the head with the billycock, and at the same instant Mademoiselle Susine strangles Doris with chloroform?"

"By thunder, Chick——"

"Hold on. I don't say that I am right; but it could be done, dead easy. You can see that."

"Yes."

"Next they drag their victims from the car; they place them somewhere out of the way; they put the dynamite in place and light the fuse, and then they hide themselves behind that rock until after the explosion—and there you are."

"But how did they get away with Hamilton and Doris, Chick?"

"By the help of confederates, I suppose. Good gracious, I wasn't there! If I had been I wouldn't have to be guessing at the business now."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE IDENTITY OF A PRINCESS.

And now it becomes our duty to return to Nick Carter.

In the character he had assumed of his own valet, Joseph, he sat stolidly in the seat under the steering-wheel, and after they left the house no word was spoken at all until they approached the scene of the wreck.

But here the princess leaned forward and touched him on the shoulder.

"Joseph," she said, "would you mind stopping here for a moment?"

He brought the car to a halt and the princess sprang lightly to the ground, after which she walked carefully around the wreck, viewing it from all sides with the eye of one who is careful to take in and comprehend every detail, no matter how small.

Nick appeared not to watch her at all, but sat silently waiting for her to resume her seat in the car, as was his duty as a good servant.

Presently she passed around to the opposite side of the Peerless, and jumped into the forward seat beside Nick.

"I think I will ride here with you, Joseph," she said. "I like the front seat better than the tonneau."

"Yes, madam," he replied, and started the car.

For a little time after that there was silence; but then the princess spoke.

"Is your master very severely ill, Joseph?" she asked.

"I am afraid, madam, that even by this time I may have no master," he replied lugubriously.

"Indeed! Is it so bad as that? Do you know how it happened?"

"It was not explained to me, madam."

"I understood that he had a fall, or something of the sort, there near the wreck," she ventured.

Nick made no reply to this.

"Did Doctor Stag give you no hope for him?" she asked.

"Doctor Stag is a man who says very little about his patients, madam; especially to a servant."

She was silent then for a considerable time; but at last she asked:

"Did you hear, Joseph, what your master and his assistant thought about the accident?"

"No, madam."

"Or how they accounted for the disappearance of Mr. Hamilton and his fiancée?"

"No, madam."

"You are something of a detective yourself, aren't you, Joseph?"

"No, madam."

"But there have been times when you have assisted your master in his work? No?"

"Yes, madam. In a very humble way."

"Have you a personal opinion concerning the accident, Joseph?"

"Yes, madam."

"Indeed! I wish you would tell me what it is."

"No, madam. That would be presumptuous on my part."

"Not at all, since I ask it."

"My master would not like it, madam."

"On the contrary, I think he would. I am quite as anxious to clear up this mystery as anybody could be. What is your opinion about it? Tell me. I command you."

Nick was silent for a long time before he replied, and during that time he shifted his seat just a little so that

he could see his companion better out of the corner of his eye. Then, in his humblest tone, he said:

"Madam would not regard my opinion as anything short of a crazy notion."

"What nonsense, Joseph! Of course, I would not do that."

"Madam is very kind."

"Come, then! Tell me what you think about it."

"I do not think it was an accident at all, madam," was the cool reply.

The princess gasped. She turned so that she directly faced Nick. Then she demanded:

"What in the world do you mean by that statement?"

"I told madam that she would think my notion a crazy one," he replied.

"Nevertheless, tell me what it is."

"I do not think, madam, that the disaster was the result of an accident. I think that it was design."

"Design?"

"If madam will pardon me, I think it was the result of a carefully laid plot. There was no collision; two persons are missing; the machine is wrecked beyond repair; three of the passengers escaped alive, one of them to die shortly afterward, and two were uninjured."

"Well?"

"To me, madam, it looks as if the machine was blown up with dynamite."

The princess gasped again.

"But, Joseph," she cried, "I was there—myself."

"Yes, madam."

"Don't you suppose that if we had been blown up with dynamite, I would have been aware of the fact? Don't you suppose I would have known it?"

"If madam will pardon me again, most people who are blown up with dynamite do not know about it afterward; and those who do are usually at a safe distance when the explosion takes place."

"Well, upon my word! One would think—Joseph, what do you mean?"

"Madam will pardon me! I don't know what I mean, perhaps. Madam insisted that I should explain my opinion, and—"

"Yes. But you haven't gone far enough."

"It is impossible for me to go any further, at present."

The princess remained in deep thought for a moment, then she smiled.

"I think I understand you," she said. "You mean that some scoundrels put a dynamite cartridge in the road, and then waited among the bushes until the motor-car was over it when it was fired. Is that what you mean?"

"Something like that, madam."

"And that the shock of the explosion hurled us all out, some of us to be injured, and others to escape injury? I see. Yes. That is all very likely. But that does not explain the absence of Mr. Hamilton and Lady Doris Granley, nor does it explain the object of the attack, Joseph."

"Not unless the one explains the other, madam," said Nick.

"You mean that the object of the attack was primarily to steal those two persons away, whether they were dead or alive?" she asked.

"Yes, madam."

"But who could entertain such an object as that?"

"A woman named Madge Morley, madam."

"Oh!" she laughed lightly. "A jealous woman, I suppose. I have never heard of her. Really, Joseph, with all due consideration I must say that your opinion is a little—er—far-fetched, don't you?"

"Very possibly, madam."

"Who is Madge Morley, Joseph?"

"A beautiful woman, madam, who hates my master; who hates Mr. Hamilton and Miss Doris; who has lately been in prison, but who has escaped; who has sworn vengeance against them all, and who, I can assure you, madam, would not remain long at liberty if my master were in condition to hunt her down."

"She must be a very bad woman, indeed, Joseph. Can you tell me more about her?"

"No, madam. Joseph knows nothing about her save what he has been told."

"I have heard," said the princess, after another pause, "that Mr. Chickering Carter, your master's first assistant, is almost as expert as Nick Carter himself. I suppose, now that the chief is incapacitated, Chick will take up the search for this mysterious woman; no?"

The supposed Joseph shook his head, as if he were in great doubt about it.

"Why not?" she asked him.

"I don't think that under the circumstances Mr. Chick could be induced to leave his chief, madam; at least, not until there is a great improvement."

The princess did not speak after that until they had entered the city and were almost at the entrance to the hotel. Then she said:

"Are you going directly back to the country, Joseph?"

"I have a few errands to do in the city, madam. Is there any service that I can perform for madam?"

"No. Thank you. Only, if you should hear any further news of your master by telephone, before you return, I would be glad if you would stop here and let me know about it."

"I will do so—if there is any news," he said; and brought the car to a stop in front of the hotel.

As soon as the two women had alighted, Nick drove his car directly to his own house, and passing inside, sent the machine to the garage.

Thirty minutes later he came out again, but he was no longer Joseph, but, instead, he represented a middle aged

gentleman, who might have been a well-to-do merchant, or a professional man temporarily visiting the city; and he made his way directly to the Hotel Mammoth.

Here he examined the register very carefully, and he found that the princess had at least told him the truth about the time of her arrival in the city. They had registered the evening before.

He also noted the number of the rooms the two women were occupying, on the tenth floor, and, being entirely familiar with the building, he asked the room clerk if he could secure room 1023. It happened to be the room adjoining the suite occupied by the princess and her friend.

"Yes," replied the clerk. "That room is vacant."

Nick registered—as Jasper H. Carson, Syracuse—and was conducted to the tenth floor.

When he entered his room he left the door wide ajar, presumably for air, for the day was a warm one; and then, thoroughly exhausted by his exertions—for it must not be forgotten that he was far from being a well man—he drew the couch around so that he could obtain a good view of the hall toward the door of the adjoining suite, and stretching himself upon it he gave himself up to reflection.

His thoughts took the following form:

"I would not have believed that Madge Morley—or anybody—could disguise herself so effectually that I would not penetrate it at once; and I cannot say positively that I believe it yet. If the princess is Madge Morley, how has she done it? And if the princess is *not* Madge Morley, who is she? Again, if the princess is Madge Morley, the other woman is Norma Denton, and so in that case I am confronted by two disguises that I have not been able to see through.

"If the princess is Madge Morley, there is an alteration in the expression of the eyes and mouth, in the shape of the nose, and in her manner of walking, as well as in the color of hair, shape of eyebrows, and—in fact, in everything.

"Norma Denton might fool me. I never saw her but once or twice, and then she was not entirely herself. But Madge——"

The detective, for once in his life, was in great doubt.

He was also very tired, and thinking so deeply, about subjects so perplexing, brought about a sensation of drowsiness.

Gradually his eyes drooped and closed; his breathing became more regular, and he slept.

Ten minutes later the door of the adjoining suite opened, and the princess came out.

As she was passing the open door, she stopped and looked inside; and then, after a hasty glance up and down the corridor, she moved abruptly and crossed the threshold into Nick Carter's room.

CHAPTER IX.

PEDRO, THE DOG DETECTIVE.

We are obliged, for sake of the sequence of this story, to leave Nick Carter again, and to return to Chick, who, it will be remembered, brought the bloodhound into the city with him.

That he had a special object in view in so doing, goes without saying, for none knew better than he about the sagacity of the dog.

His own suspicions and Nick's were coincidental in effect, as we now know, although the two had exchanged no confidences concerning them.

But Chick felt that he was justified in taking matters rather into his own hands, in defiance of the implied wishes of his chief, because of the fact that he knew that Nick was not in a proper physical condition to undertake the work he had set out to do.

Chick was troubled in his own mind lest Nick should overdo the matter; lest he should attempt to do more than his strength, after the severe ordeal he had passed through, would warrant, and he was, therefore, determined to keep an eye upon events, if it were possible to do so.

As soon, therefore, as he had parted with Doctor Stag and had delivered the automobile to the place where it belonged, he also, as Nick had done, hastened home—to Nick Carter's city house.

He discovered there, as he had expected he would do, that Nick had been there, and had discarded the valet's costume; and he set about examining what was left among Nick's various articles of disguise, in order to determine what the detective had worn when he went out.

He was not long in making up his mind to that, and knowing that the princess and Mademoiselle Suzine were stopping at the Mammoth, he naturally decided that Nick had gone there also.

At the hotel he did exactly what Nick had done before him; he examined the register.

And he found what Nick had found—that the princess and her friend occupied suite No. 1025-7-9; and he also found that a certain Jasper H. Carson had lately arrived from Syracuse and had taken room No. 1023.

He went to the elevator then and ascended to the tenth floor; and presently he arrived before the open door of 1023.

There was nobody in the room, although a pillow on the couch with the impression of a head upon it where

somebody had been resting, suggested that some one had been there quite recently.

Chick seated himself to wait, but after he had waited an hour and nobody appeared, he decided that the princess or her friend—or both of them—had gone out, and that Nick had followed them.

He was rather surprised that there was no satchel in the room, for he knew that Nick had taken one from the house, and he was in doubt what it was best for him to do; whether he should wait where he was for the return of the detective, or leave some message behind him, and go; for there were several things that he wished very much to attend to at once.

He finally decided upon the latter course, and, accordingly, he produced an envelope from one of his pockets, tore it in half, and, after folding the blank part of it in a peculiar manner, he left it where Nick would be sure to discover it on his return, and took his departure.

That folded bit of paper would mean absolutely nothing to third parties, but between the detective and his first assistant it was as legible as if he had written on it:

"Have been here and waited. Must attend to other things. Will return later. Leave word for me if you go out."

He left the door open as he had found it, when he went out, and when he reached the ground floor of the hotel he spent a little time in walking about through the corridors, believing it possible that he might encounter Nick.

But he did not meet him, and so, after a little, he took his way back again to the house, where he had left Pedro.

Those who have read the preceding stories about Madge Morley* will recall the fact that she was overtaken and arrested in a house situated in the Bronx, where it stood alone in the midst of spacious grounds, untenanted and deserted. Madge had merely commandeered it for her special uses at the time; and it was there where she had wounded the detective.

Chick knew that the house was deserted; he knew that it had been so since Madge and the others had been taken from it: and now his plan was to go there. For what purpose we shall presently discover.

It was rapidly getting toward the hour of evening, notwithstanding the fact that the season was near that of the longest day in the year, and Chick waited until he knew that it would be quite dark before he arrived at the old house.

*Nos. 517, 518, 519, NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

Then, calling Pedro to accompany him, he entered the automobile at the door, and drove away.

The old house was surrounded by spacious grounds, now overgrown with weeds; the front door, which Nick Carter had once broken down with a heavy stone, still clung, a shattered wreck, by one hinge.

Chick left the automobile where it would not be noticed from the road, and, passing through the weed-grown paths entered the house, followed by the dog.

He had a light in one of his pockets, but he did not require one as yet; nor did he pass far beyond the threshold of the house at once.

But he called Pedro to him, and, taking the princess' glove from his pocket, he pressed it, for the third time that day, against the dog's nose.

"*Vamanos*, Pedro!" he said. "Go find! *Vamanos!*"

Pedro turned about at once—and Chick lighted a cigar and seated himself to wait for developments.

He knew well that if there was any article in that house which had ever been handled by the woman who had worn that glove, Pedro would find it. It was not at all likely that the Princess Sorosis could have visited that house unless she were either associated with the escaped woman convict, or was Madge Morley in person, as Chick believed he had good reason to suspect.

And, therefore, if the sagacity of Pedro should discover some object which the hand that had worn that glove had touched, it would be—to Chick, at least—proof positive that Princess Sorosis was implicted in the "accident" on the highway near Nick Carter's country home.

Chick knew well that Pedro would make no mistake.

The dog's nose was unerring.

There might have been a thousand articles of wearing-apparel scattered around that house that had been worn by other women; he would have nothing to do with any of them, unless there should be among them one that the same women had worn or handled.

And again, there might be any object whatever, no matter how trivial or how well concealed, that she had used or handled, Pedro would find it.

Nor was there any necessity for following and watching the dog during the time he was searching. Pedro could work quite as well, or better, even, in the dark; and there was a way by which he could tell Chick plainly of the fact, the instant he made a discovery.

And after a little the summons came.

A quick, sharp, joyous bark thrilled through the empty

building, and it said as plainly as words in the English language could have conveyed the message:

"I have discovered something. Come and see what it is."

Chick lost no time in complying with that request.

He started to his feet, took the electric search-light from his pocket, pressed the button, and hurried to overtake the dog.

He mounted to the upper floor, for it was from there that the sound had proceeded; and at the top of the stairs he stopped and called out:

"Pedro, where are you?"

The reply was instant.

A second short, sharp bark answered the question, and Chick passed along to the end of the hall and thence through an open doorway into a large square room which bore many evidences of having been used not very long ago.

It had been indeed the room which Madge had called her own during the time she made one of that house, and Chick recalled the fact instantly when he crossed the threshold.

"Pedro, you are a jewel," he said. "Now, show me what you have found."

The huge animal was standing beside an old couch, sniffing at it vigorously.

He ran from one end of it to the other; then he leaped upon it, and began with his paws to dig at the upholstering at the back, where it joined the seat.

"Is there something there, old fellow?" asked Chick.

The dog barked his reply, and Chick drew his jackknife to cut away the couch-covering.

But he thought better of that idea before he put it into practice, and, hauling the couch into the middle of the room, he stood upon it, and, with one swift stroke of his foot, kicked away the back of it so that it fell to the floor.

If he had thought to find a single article which would connect the scent of the glove with Madge Morley, he was amazed at what he did find.

The upholstering of the couch between the back and the bottom of it seemed to have been a regular depository for many of Madge's secrets.

Among the numerous articles which fell to the floor when the back of the couch was kicked away there were a number of letters, a purse, two photographs, and a gold cigarette-case.

It was the purse, however, upon which the dog instantly pounced, and he picked it up and laid it at Chick's feet, after which he looked up, as much as to say: "See what I have found."

The purse was of soft leather and it bore the monogram "M-M" in gold. There was no doubt at all that it had been the property of Madge Morley.

Inside, there was a hundred dollars in currency, several engraved cards bearing Madge Morley's name, some loose change, etc.

Chick held the purse for a moment against Pedro's nose, at which the dog barked again, as if to announce that there was no mistake; so Chick dropped it into one of his pockets and gave his attention to the remaining articles.

The gold cigarette-case had engraved upon it the letters "L. E. H.," which were Lawrence Hamilton's initials: it contained several cigarettes of his favorite brand.

Chick dropped that into his pocket and looked at the letters.

They were one and all dated ten years back, they were all addressed to Lawrence Hamilton, and, upon looking inside, which Chick felt that he was privileged to do under the circumstances, he discovered that they were of a very endearing quality, and were written to Lawrence Hamilton by an old sweetheart, who signed herself sometimes "Laura," but once at least by the full name of Laura Bullard.

He deposited the letters in his pocket and picked up the photographs. Then he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

The pictures had evidently been taken a long time ago, but, nevertheless, Princess Sorosis, as Chick knew her, might well have sat for them.

Allowing for the changes that ten years might have produced, they were splendid likenesses. There could be no doubt of that.

But after that one exclamation of surprise, Chick smiled broadly.

"I see the whole game now," he said. "It is as plain as the nose on my face. Madge stole the letters and the photograph—as well as the cigarette-case—from Hamilton's room, and she doubtless has many more of each concealed somewhere else; and now she has used all her arts in making herself up as a counterpart of Laura Bullard; then, with the information gleaned from the letters, it was comparatively easy for her to impose upon

Hamilton, who could not be expected to remember how an old sweetheart looked, after ten years of separation.

"Pedro, you have done well. I think now that I will take the case in my own hands and arrest Princess Sorosis without waiting to ask permission of anybody.

CHAPTER X.

THE ABDUCTION OF NICK CARTER.

It was after midnight when Chick arrived home and left Pedro there.

He was, however, mindful of the promise which the folded half of an envelope he had left in the room at the hotel had conveyed, and he felt that Nick would be expecting him, so after feeding the dog and securing a tasty bite himself, he hurried to the Mammoth.

The hour was so late that he thought it best to apply at the hotel desk for permission to go up-stairs to room 1023, so he went to the clerk and said:

"I believe that Mr. Jasper H. Carson, of Syracuse, is stopping here. He was to have taken room 1023, and is, I think, expecting me. Will you send a boy up with me at once, please?"

The clerk smiled at him and hesitated. Then he asked:

"Are you a friend of Mr. Carson?"

"Yes," replied Chick, with some impatience.

"Also from Syracuse?" continued the clerk.

"No; from New York. But I don't see what difference that makes to you."

"It doesn't make any difference at all, sir; you must excuse me. But there is something a little bit singular about your friend. May I ask if he is a drinking man?"

"Eh? What's the matter with him?" demanded Chick.

"I do not know—positively—that anything is the matter with him."

"Then what are you driving at?"

"Mr. Carson registered soon after five o'clock this afternoon. He asked for that particular room. I know, because it happened to be me who waited upon him. The room was vacant at the time, and he got it. He said that he should probably be here two days at least, but that it might happen that he would wish to leave at a moment's notice, so he paid for the room two days in advance. Then he went up-stairs."

"Well? Go on. What else?"

"He went to his room. He drew out the couch and put a pillow on it, leaving his door open. One of the aids on that hall saw him lying there asleep; but at half-past six it was reported to me that he had gone, with his bag. In short, sir, Mr. Carson is not here, and I have no idea where he is. I shall hold the room, however, during the time he has paid for it."

Chick scarcely heard what was said to him, although he really was conscious of ever word.

But instantly there flashed through his mind the recollection of Pedro's tracing the footsteps of the princess to that trellis, at Nick's country home. He remembered, too, that although the blinds were closed and the curtains were drawn at the windows of Nick's room, where he was supposed to have been lying very ill, the window itself was open, on account of the summer heat.

"What could be more possible," thought Chick, "than that she heard something of what was said in that room and was therefore 'wise' to Nick's plan?"

He addressed the clerk again.

"Wasn't he seen anywhere around the hotel after he went to his room?" he asked.

"No, sir. He has not been seen since he ascended in the elevator."

"Oh, well, I wouldn't worry about it, if I were you," said Chick, forcing a laugh. "He'll turn up all right somewhere. He always does. By the way, clerk, I think he was agent, or something of the sort, for some properties belonging to a Princess Something-or-other who should be stopping here. Do you know any——"

"Princess Sorosis?"

"Yes. That's the name."

"The princess has gone."

"Gone! Since when?"

"She left here soon after ten to-night. She was to take the ten-thirty train for the West, at the Grand Central Wait a moment. Oh, yes; here it is. Mail to be forwarded to the Auditorium, at Chicago. Possibly, if your friend was attorney for the princess, he may have accompanied her to the station, at least."

"No doubt," said Chick; and he thought deeply for a moment.

"Look here, old man," he said suddenly, then. "I think I'll be perfectly frank with you, only I would like you to keep a still tongue in your head, for a time at least. Anyhow, you are likely to do that. Mr. Jasper H. Carson was really Nick Carter in disguise."

"What?"

"It's a fact. Nick has been ill. He was wounded rather more than a month ago, and he has not recov-

ered from the effects of it. He ought not to have come out on this case at all, in fact."

"Then who are you?"

"I am Chick; you have heard of me, I guess."

"I should say so."

"You are a new man here, or I would have made myself known to you at once. I know most of the clerks here. Nick would have done the same. What is your name?"

"Collins."

"Well, Mr. Collins, there has been some crooked work here somewhere. In the first place, that princess was no princess at all, but one of the sharpest of women crooks. I don't mind telling you that I was here at six o'clock myself and went directly to Nick's room then. I found the door open, as you say; also the pillow on the lounge. But there was no satchel in the room."

"Then you should have known——"

"That's just the point; I should have known, but I didn't. I probably got there just a few minutes after that woman had found Nick asleep, chloroformed him, and dragged him into her own apartments."

"Great Cæsar! You don't mean to say that she would dare to do that?"

"She would dare to carry away this hotel, with everybody in it, if she was big enough to lift it. Come along up stairs with me to those rooms, will you?"

"Of course I will; but I would like to have you do me one favor."

"What is it, Mr. Collins?"

"Keep this matter quiet—about the princess being a fake, I mean. I happened to register her, and I am new here. It might go against me."

"Don't worry. Just help me to take a look through those rooms—the suite of the princess, too—and nobody need know that either of them have been here at all. I don't suppose there is anybody occupying the princess' rooms now, eh?"

"No."

They found Nick's room exactly in the condition in which Chick had seen it at six o'clock, and the folded half of an envelope was still where Chick had put it.

"Nothin' doing here," said Chick. "Let's go into the other rooms."

There were four rooms in the suite—two bedrooms, a parlor, and a bath; but Madge—if the princess were indeed Madge, which Chick no longer doubted—with her customary forethought and sagacity, had left no scrap of a clue behind her. More than that, the rooms had, of course, been "made up" since her departure.

"Nothing doing here, either," said Chick, in disgust. "The question now is, how did she get Nick out of the hotel?"

"You seem to be very sure that he has fallen into her hands," said Collins.

"I am. Just as sure as that you are standing there at this moment. Say, did Madge—did the princess send out to buy anything this evening, before she went away?"

"No; but she *went* out and bought something."

"What was it?"

"A trunk."

"A big one? Eh?"

"Yes."

'I don't suppose you have missed any pillows from her room, have you? Since she went away to-night?"

Collins stared at Chick. Then he replied:

"We have not missed any from her room, but four have been reported missing from other rooms on that floor. Why do you ask that question?"

"Because, she bought the trunk in order to pack Nick Carter inside of it, and she would need several pillows in order to pack him tightly. Let's go down-stairs, and when we get there I wish you would send for the porter who took charge of her baggage, will you?"

"At once. Yes."

When the porter appeared, Chick questioned him at once.

"Did you take charge of the baggage from 1025-7-9 to-night?" he asked.

"I did, sir; at ten o'clock, sir."

"Exactly. What became of it?"

"There were four trunks, sir; one brand-new one. They all went to the Grand Central, sir."

"Sure about that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Which railroad?"

"Hudson River, sir."

"Who took them there?"

"They went on the carriages, sir. The ladies was afraid they'd be late, so they took two four-wheelers, sir, and two of the trunks went on each carriage. They paid extra for it, and they gave me a good tip for making the arrangements for them."

"Do you know those two drivers?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you find them—*at once*?"

"Yes, sir; if Mr. Collins will let me go away for half an hour."

"How far have we to go?" asked Chick, as soon as they were in the street.

"Twenty-seventh Street, near Fourth Avenue. It isn't far."

The two drivers were found; it so happened that they slept in the stable where they worked; and they remembered the circumstance perfectly. The one who acted as spokesman said:

"Sure, sir, I thought there was something queer about them two, from the way they acted; only I wouldn't have thought so if it hadn't been that I drove around that way again after I'aving the trunks at the out-going baggage-room."

"What was it that you saw then?"

"I saw them same trunks being loaded onto two more hacks, sir, and I knowed then that the women weren't going to I'ave town at all. But I said nothing at all about it, for sure it was none of my funeral."

"Did you recognize either of the drivers who were taking the trunks? Or the carriages?"

"No, sir."

"And I don't suppose you would know either of them again if you should see them? Not if I paid you well to find them?"

"I am afraid not, sir. I didn't pay any attention more than I have said."

"Did you see them start away?"

"One of them. He went north, and so he must have turned through Forty-fourth Street, as far as Madison Avenue, anyhow."

Chick gave the man a dollar for his trouble, and turned away, and, after feeing the porter, he bade him good night, and started homeward, sorely distressed in mind.

Madge had given him the slip at just the moment when he thought he had her cornered; and, more than that, she had Nick Carter again in her power; and not only Nick, but Doris Granley and Lawrence Hamilton as well!

But where had she gone? To what place had she fled?

Chick arrived home without being able to offer himself an answer to the question, but as he entered the door Pedro came to meet him, and then like a flash it came upon him.

Madge has gone to that same old house in the Bronx!" he exclaimed aloud; and he turned and dashed out of the house again, with Pedro following closely at his heels.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SECRET OF THE HOUSE IN THE BRONX.

There was adequate reason for Chick's precipitate haste.

Like an inspiration it had occurred to him that Madge Morley, finding that Nick Carter had almost thrown himself into her power and realizing that she must make her escape from the hotel at once, had cast about her memory for a suitable temporary hiding-place, and that doubtless the old house in the Bronx had at once occurred to her.

Chick figured it out like this:

"The presence of Nick Carter in the hotel and in the adjoining room to hers told her that he had guessed that Princess Sorosis and Madge Morley were one and the same. The instant she made the discovery that he was there, she decided to make a captive of him, and, finding him sleeping, as she had done, it had been an easy matter to chloroform him and to carry him into her own rooms.

"Then arose the question how to get him out of the hotel, and where to take him afterward; and here," Chick argued with himself, "she has remembered the old house and the likelihood that it would be the very last place where her enemies would expect to find her, for the reason that it was from that very place she had been taken on the occasion of her last arrest."

But right there Chick's argument ceased.

"Why shouldn't she have taken Nick to the same place where she has already taken Hamilton and Doris?" he asked himself; and then he uttered an exclamation aloud.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "What is more likely than that Hamilton and Doris are concealed somewhere about that old place right now? Madge had no time to arrange any very deliberate plans; she had to select some place to which her prisoners could be taken at once, and where they could be detained until she could go to them; and again she has not had the opportunity to see her prisoners, since the wreck of the automobile, until tonight."

He asked himself if it were possible that he had been quite near to Hamilton and Doris when he had himself visited that old house earlier that night.

Pedro would not have warned him that they were there,

even had he scented them, for the reason that the dog had been given but one idea; he had been instructed to search for a certain scent, and would ignore all others.

Chick had paused upon the door-steps while he turned these thoughts over in his mind, and now he turned back again hastily and ran up the stairs.

He was gone only a moment, however, and when he returned he brought with him two small paper parcels, one of which contained a pair of dogskin gloves which Hamilton had once left at the detective's house, and the other, a piece of fancy work which Doris had made for Nick, and which had been carefully folded away ever since she had worked upon it.

And now he hastened to the place where the automobile was kept, and was soon again speeding toward the old house in the Bronx.

He knew that it would be daylight—or that it would lack only a little while of it—by the time he arrived at his destination, and he realized when he was almost there that he should have brought some assistance along with him; but in his haste he had totally forgotten the likelihood that Madge would doubtless have confederates on hand.

However, he did not turn back. He realized that there was no time to lose, for now that the three people against whom Madge had pitted herself were in her power, she would not be inclined to extend much mercy to them.

He stopped the machine half a mile away from the place lest the noise of its approach should warn Madge of his coming, and then commanding Pedro to be silent and to follow along quietly at his heels, he made his way rapidly toward the old mansion.

The first indications of dawn were manifesting themselves in the east as Chick entered the spacious grounds that surrounded the house; but it was yet quite far from daylight.

Then another thought occurred to him, and he stopped stock-still in his tracks.

"If Madge *did* come to this place from the hotel," he thought, "she has already discovered that I have been here, and that I have found out the secrets of the old lounge." Then he smiled as he added: "All the more reason why she will think that I am not likely to come again."

As he passed through the broken gateway to enter the grounds, Pedro stopped stock-still, looked up at him, and whined.

"Good!" said Chick. "You have struck Madge's scent already, have you, old fellow? That is proof enough that she is here. Now, wait, Pedro. I must give you your instructions."

He stepped into the bushes at one side of the path and again touched Pedro's nose with the gloves that the princess had worn; and Pedro whined and wagged his tail.

"Got that, Pedro?" asked Chick. "Good boy! Now, get the scent of this on your mind, too."

He undid one of the small parcels and made the dog smell of Hamilton's dogskin gloves; and again Pedro wagged his tail and whined.

"All right," said Chick. "You will remember that, too, won't you? Now, just one more, old fellow," and he brought out the bit of fancy work upon which Doris had labored.

Pedro recognized that scent at once, for the dog loved Doris; and he made his knowledge manifest to Chick, too.

"Now," said Chick, "I think we are ready to proceed; and, Pedro, you have got to take the part of several men in this affair. I rely upon you, old dog. I didn't think far enough ahead to bring help along with me, so it is up to you to be my assistant. Come along;" but before he started he turned and grasped the bloodhound by the muzzle and said to him in a low tone:

"Quiet, boy; Not a sound! No noise! Quiet!"

He released the dog then, and they started for the house, gilding along through the shadows of the trees until they were at the front door.

Everything had the appearance of being exactly as Chick had left it, and it was only the eagerness of the bloodhound which told the young detective that others had been there since he had left the place.

There was light enough now in the sky so that he had no need to make use of his electric lantern; and as he went forward he held the dog in leash, so that the animal would not get too far in advance of him.

And so they ascended the stairs to the upper floor; thus they journeyed together to that same room where Chick had kicked the lounge apart and discovered the photographs and other things.

Apparently the conditions were as he had left them; only the conduct of the dog advised him to the contrary.

But the dog did not seek to remain in the room. It followed some trail to the broken lounge; he turned

and retraced his steps to the door; he passed out again, and once more down the stairs; on the ground floor he entered first one room and then another, passing only a few feet inside of each one, as if the person whose trail he was pursuing had merely looked into them and had then gone away; and at last he led Chick to another door under the stairs, and halted in front of it, raising his head as if to say that he wanted it opened for him.

Chick tried the door, and found that it was locked against him; more than that, he discovered that it was bolted on the opposite side.

"That was a foolish thing to do, Madge," Chick murmured to himself; "foolish, because it tells me that you have gone down there and locked the door after you."

Chick always carried with him the same sort of a case of tools which Nick Carter was never without, and in a moment he had fitted a sharp chisel into the handle, and with it he speedily made a small hole through the soft pine wood of which the cellar door was made.

Then, replacing the chisel with a tiny saw, he rapidly made a hole with it through which he could thrust his fingers; and within ten minutes of the time he reached the door, he had drawn back the bolt that impeded his progress.

It was now daylight, although the cellar below him was quite dark.

But Chick did not hesitate on that account.

Replacing the case of tools in his pocket, he produced his search-light, and, throwing the gleam of it in front of him, he began the descent of the rickety stairs, Pedro going in advance.

But there was nothing to stop him.

He reached the cellar floor, and discovered that he was in a spacious excavation that was littered with refuse of all sorts. Boxes and barrels, lumber, broken furniture, broken crockery, heaps of dirt and refuse of all kinds was on every side of him; but Pedro paid no attention to any of these things.

Instead, he crossed the cellar floor through the maze of rubbish as unerringly as if a well-defined path had been before him, and he stopped and sniffed at one end of a row upon which half a dozen cider-barrels rested; and then he looked up into Chick's face, as if to ask him to move that out of the way.

Chick seized the barrel that was nearest to him and pulled upon it. The result was surprising, for the entire row, which held the six barrels glided out from the foundation of the house with such ease that a boy might have moved it, and disclosed behind and under the barrier, a square trap-door of planks.

There was a ring attached to it, too, and Chick lost no time in seizing upon it, whereupon he found that the door was easily raised, and that it revealed a flight of narrow steps that led downward into the darkness below.

"Pedro," murmured Chick, "I would never have found this place in the world if it had not been for that nose of yours. This is a queer sort of a nest, isn't it? I don't believe that Madge knew about it when she made use of this house before, or we wouldn't have had such an easy time finding her. It is more than likely that one of the convicts in the prison has told her about it."

A narrow passage, cemented on either side and at the top and bottom, led away in a straight line toward the east, and with Pedro still held in leash, Chick followed it.

Chick recalled to mind the fact that in that direction, about two hundred feet from the old mansion, there was a ruin of what appeared to have once been an ice-house; it stood upon a knoll surrounded by trees, and seemed to have fallen into utter decay. He wondered now if the passage he was following led to that ruin.

He had advanced perhaps half the length of the passageway, when he heard a gruff voice, which proceeded from some distance ahead of him, exclaim:

"Oh, dry up! I won't be gone but a minute."

Then he heard the sound of a closing door followed by steps approaching in his direction.

The sounds seemed to proceed from around a turn in the passage, and he released the button of his light, and waited in utter darkness for the man to draw near.

He came into view suddenly, swinging around the corner of the passage, and he strode directly toward the spot where Chick and Pedro were awaiting him.

He was a big, burly-looking ruffian, and he carried a lantern in his hand—a fortunate thing for Chick, since the light of it blinded the man who was carrying it.

Chick realized that if he should permit the man to approach close enough so that he was drawn into the circle of light, both he and Pedro would be discovered, and the man would have time to call out a warning to his friends.

Plainly, there was only one thing for Chick to do—and he did it.

He took his heaviest revolver in his right hand and raised it above his head; and then, as the man came to a

point that was near enough, Chick threw it with all his might, and with unerring aim, straight at the head of the approaching man.

It struck him squarely upon the forehead, and the result was the same as if he had been hit with a hammer, for he sank to the floor of the passage like a stricken bullock, and without even a groan to announce that he had been attacked.

And in another moment Chick had him ironed and gagged, so that he was utterly helpless.

CHAPTER XII.

PEDRO'S TERRIBLE REVENGE.

Chick stepped over the prostrate body of the man he had captured, after satisfying himself that he could neither escape nor give an alarm when consciousness should return to him. He also released Pedro from the leash, and then he went forward to the turn in the passage and around it, where he was brought up standing before the door that he had heard the man close behind him only a moment ago.

He extinguished his light again, and then he saw that it was indeed fortunate that the man he had attacked had made no sound, for the door in front of where he stood was not closed tightly.

It had evidently sprung partly open again when the man threw it behind him, for there was a crack an inch wide between it and the rude casing against which it closed.

And Chick could see through this narrow aperture, for, greatly to his surprise, there was daylight beyond the door; daylight and sunlight, for the sun had risen since Chick entered the old house.

Resting his hand upon Pedro's head to keep him quiet—for the dog was trembling violently in his eagerness to dash forward into that place beyond, Chick threw himself flat upon his belly, and then drew the door just a little more ajar; and thus he was enabled to see into the place.

It was what he had already guessed it to be—the interior of the old ruin of an ice-house—and it was indeed a strange-looking place.

Evidently there was no means of entering or leaving the place save by the passage along which Chick had come, unless one were to climb out over the tops of the [illegible] walls of the building. Roof there was none, only a narrow opening that was hidden from view from the outside by being adjusted well down inside the walls; but this was now rolled aside to admit light and air, for the morning was a warm one.

The place itself was perhaps twenty feet square, and there were chairs and cots—several of them—a table and other things in the strange room. There was also a stamp, a retort, a miniature milling-machine, and a portable furnace packed in one corner of the place, showing that it had, at one time at least, been a resort for people who had made counterfeit coins.

But it was not the sight of these articles that attracted the attention of Chick; it was the sudden recognition of the people who were in the room—and there were six.

Madge Morley—still in outward appearance, Princess Serena—was seated at the table. Opposite her was seated Mademoiselle Susine, now with her disguise partly removed, so that the features of Norma Denton were revealed; and the two were eating breakfast.

On one of the couches, bound hand and foot, was Nick Carter, and near him, on another, was Larry Hamilton, also bound and helpless.

Not far from them, occupying the only armchair there was in the place, and securely tied to it so that she could not move, was Doris; and standing near the center of the room, so that he could instantly reach any one of the prisoners from where he stood, was another burly ruffian, the counterpart of the fellow now lying bound and gagged in the passageway. He held a horsewhip in his hand, and from the appearance of a welt across Hamilton's face, it was only too evident what use he was expected to make of it. In fact, at the very moment when Chick first took in the scene that had so strangely opened before him, Madge was laughing, and he heard her say derisively:

"If you don't like the sting of that whip across your face, Larry Hamilton, you will keep a still tongue in your head. Slash them, Red, if they utter a sound." And she continued calmly with her cold breakfast.

After a moment she looked up and laughed again.

"What a dolt you were, Hamilton, to be fooled by me as you were; to believe that your old sweetheart, Laura Bullard, had returned to see you; eh? Doris, you really ought to be jealous of that old sweetheart. You should see the letters she wrote to him, and which he has kept all these years. Oh, but it was funny!

"I have forbidden you to talk," she went on again after a moment; "so it is impossible to ask questions unless you want a swish across the face with that whip, and

Red's; but I'll give you a little information that will be pleasant to hear.

"Doris, here, was expecting to be married to-day. It would be too bad to disappoint her, and since Red wants a wife, I have got a priest coming here presently to marry her to him. That will be nice, won't it? When that is done, he shall take her away with him where he pleases."

There was no reply to this horrible threat. Doris had already been tortured to a point where her despair was dumb in its agony; and Madge continued:

"As for you, Lawrence Hamilton, you will be kept a prisoner here until thirty days have passed, and then you will be set at liberty. Your punishment will be to know what Doris' fate has been—and if you can find her and Red after that, you will be at liberty to take whatever revenge you please. I fancy, however, that it won't do you much good.

"And you, Nick Carter? Well, I have a different fate for you. Fortunately, you don't possess a quarter of your usual strength just at present, so you will be easy. A few drugs will fix you, and then you go back again into the trunk, and I will take you with me. There is a tramp steamer which leaves this port in the morning to-morrow. The captain is an old acquaintance of mine, and will ask no questions. It doesn't matter whither we are bound. It is enough that it will be a very long time before you will see America again.

"Now, don't you all think that I have planned very nicely? Isn't it fine?"

She leaned back in her chair, swallowed a glass of claret, and laughed aloud.

"You are a fiend!" exclaimed Nick Carter; but he got no further ere the whip in Red's hand fell sharply across his face.

The effect of that blow from the whip was startling, for on the instant that it fell Pedro, who had seen his beloved master struck, uttered a snarl like a tiger, and launched his huge body forward in one terrific leap.

His paws struck against Red's shoulders; his jaws closed with a snap upon Red's hairy throat, and the ruffian, with a scream of pain and terror, collapsed upon the floor.

Chick followed the onslaught of the dog.

He leaped into the strange room just as Madge sprang to her feet with a cry of rage on her lips and drew a dark automatic pistol from her bosom and began to fire.

But as she tried to leap from her chair, the legs of it caught in the floor so that she fell backward as she fired the pistol, with the result that the eight bullets it contained, and which were fired more rapidly than one could count, were directed toward the canvas covering of the room, and injured nobody.

Pedro heard the shots, and left the man he had attacked. He crouched once again, and then, for the second time he launched his huge body through the air, alighting upon Madge Morley in precisely the same manner in which he had attacked Red.

Her scream of terror, as she fell under his weight, was awful; but even that did not prevent Norma Denton from drawing a pistol that she had concealed about her and aiming it directly at Chick.

For some reason, however, it did not work.

The hammer snapped against the cartridge without exploding it, and the next instant Chick had torn it from her grasp and, snapping handcuffs upon her wrists behind her back, threw her unceremoniously into one corner of the room.

"Pedro!" he called sharply.

It had all happened in an instant.

Madge was scarcely down upon the floor before Chick's sharp command to the dog rang out; and, although the huge jaws of the animal were already pressing against the woman's neck, he instantly released them and raised his head.

His teeth had not punctured the skin of Madge Morley's throat; he had scarcely pressed against it hard enough to choke her; and yet she remained quite still, with wide-open, staring, sightless eyes, and with an expression of horror on her face that was terrible to see.

Chick bent over her. He shook her. He called her name; but she made no response.

He bent still lower and listened for her heart-beats, but there were none to hear; and then he slowly got upon his feet again, and in silence crossed the room to his chief.

"Attend to Doris first," ordered Nick.

"There is no need," replied Chick. "Doris has fainted; and he cut Nick's bonds, then Hamilton's, as he added:

"Larry will attend to Doris."

"And what of Madge?" asked the detective, as he struggled to his feet.

"She is dead," replied Chick laconically.

"Did Pedro——" began Nick; but Chick shook his head emphatically.

"No," he said. "Pedro did not hurt her at all; but she is dead. The fright killed her, I suppose; or the suddenness of the attack. Madge Morley's career is ended at last."

And so it proved.

The man Red was terribly injured. He was sent to the hospital, and later on to prison; as was his companion in crime, the man whom Chick had overcome in the subterranean passageway.

Norma Denton died in prison six months later, after utterly losing her mind. She had never been a willing criminal, but only a tool of Madge Morley's, who had her entirely in her power.

And it turned out later—for Norma confessed the whole thing—that the guess made by Chick in his conversation with Doctor Stag, concerning the truth about the blowing up of the automobile, was correct.

A weapon common to the use of English crooks, called a billycock, and consisting of a ball of lead sewed inside a leather case eight inches long, was the instrument with which Mrs. Aldershot had been stricken down while riding beside Madge in the tonneau of the automobile. Then Madge had leaned forward and asked Hamilton to stop the machine, and had struck him at the same moment. Red and his companion had been on hand to receive the two prisoners, and as soon as they were carried away, Madge blew up the machine with dynamite.

And so, indeed, ended the strange and terrible career of Madge Morley.

Hamilton and Doris were very quietly married immediately after the funeral of Mrs. Aldershot, and they sailed at once for Europe, to be gone a year.

THE END.

The next number of this weekly (521) will be "The Mysterious Stranger; or, Nick Carter's Complex Case."

ABOUT THE EARLY NUMBERS OF THE

TIP TOP WEEKLY

WE receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print. We would like to say right here that we have no intention of ever reprinting any of these numbers, as they have been published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 80 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays," who from now on will be found in all the following books that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine complete catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

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352—Frank Merriwell's Double Shot.
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